

# **ISLAM AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: The Role of Islamic Organizations in Promoting Pluralism in Indonesia and Malaysia**

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## *Abstrak*

Dalam kehidupan politik dan masyarakat modern, peran Ummat Islam dalam memperkuat *civil society* tidak dapat diragukan. Di wilayah Asia Tenggara hal itu tercermin dari pengakuan dan penghormatan terhadap pluralisme, sebagai salah satu komponen utama dari *civil society*, oleh organisasi Islam besar di dua negara muslim terbesar di kawasan tersebut, Indonesia dan Malaysia. Di Indonesia, komitmen itu ditunjukkan oleh NU dan PKS dengan pengakuan atas kebhinnekaan dan dukungan terhadap sebuah konsep negara yang dilandasi oleh landasan toleransi dan kebangsaan. Sementara di Malaysia dukungan terhadap pluralisme oleh ABIM dan PAS diperlihatkan dengan sikap akomodatif terhadap kelompok-kelompok non-Muslim dan penolakan atas semangat komunalisme. Dengan mengambil nilai-nilai dan metode berpikir dari tradisi Islam, organisasi-organisasi itu menunjukkan bahwa Islam baik dalam pemikiran maupun praktek merupakan elemen pendukung dalam perkembangan *civil society*.

Kata Kunci : *Civil Society*, Pluralisme, Identitas, Perspektif Keislaman, Komunalisme

## **1. Introduction**

Islam in Southeast Asia, particularly in both Malaysia and Indonesia, has played a salient role in many parts of life. In terms of civil society, Islam has occurred as one of the important elements in conveying the idea of civil society. Even though acknowledging the role of western perspectives in shaping the concept of civil society, the concept of civil society is believed to be in line with the ideal society in Islamic teaching and history. Some observers point out, for example, the concept of *khoiru ummah* (the best community), mentioned in Al-Qur'an as an Islamic ideal for society, has the same spirit and values as

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the concept of “civil”. Meanwhile, in terms of Islamic history, they indicate the Medina State as an example of Islamic entity that was filled with the spirit of civil society (Madjid, 1996: 51-55), (Rahardjo, 1996: 1-16). Such interpretation has later on not only enriched new insight about the concept of civil society, but also inspired some Islamic activists to act in shaping civil society. Significantly, Islamic organizations have been influential in developing civil society.

This paper will examine the role of Islamic organizations in civil society, particularly in the context of promoting values of pluralism in Indonesia and Malaysia from the middle to 1970s to the 1990s. Since pluralism is one of the main inherent values in civil society, which will be defined below, the exploration of this value is important. It can be used as an indicator to demonstrate the commitment of Islam and its organization toward civil society and pluralism. For that purpose this paper will examine *firstly*, each organization’s perspectives to pluralism and *secondly*, their actions in promoting values of pluralism. Four prominent Islamic organizations in Malaysia and Indonesia will be discussed. Those organizations are Nahdatul Ulama (NU), Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). The main reason for choosing those organizations is basically because they represent mainstream concepts, including the way of thoughts, methods, and objectives in both Indonesia and Malaysia. They also represent both political and cultural domain, which can be used to explore the existence of civil society (Culla, 1999). Meanwhile, from the period of 1970’s up until the 1990’s was an important period, during which some crucial movements were created by those organizations dealing with pluralism.

## **2. Civil Society and Pluralism**

In this paper, civil society is considered as a kind of society that exists in the public sphere between family and the state. It was Hegel who firstly found the difference between state and society. Alexei de Tocqueville’ thoughts, however, uses the same terminology and later influences most of the civil society’s contemporary theories and movements. Basically, in de Tocqueville’ idea, civil society has a main agenda to counter-balance the state in order to protect and to achieve people’s interests (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 1-26). According to some observers, this kind of society believes in some norms such as

egalitarianism, individual freedom, responsibility, rule of law and honoring pluralism (Keane, 1998; Seligman, 1992). Valuing pluralism is one of the central norms considering that any decisions in such society have to be made on the basis of “common will” from all of the members. Pluralism also becomes a salient value related to the spirit of equality and justice in civil society (Leifer, 1995: 354-360). Under those kind of values everybody will be given the same opportunities based on their abilities and achievement and not because of heredity or primordial backgrounds (Luth, 2002: 63-65).

According to Giddens, pluralism is related to the equal coexistence of several sub-cultures within a given society (Giddens, 1989: 271-272, 737). Giddens indicates that “plural society” always consist of several ethnic groups which have differences among them in terms of language, history, religion and adornment (*Ibid*: 244). Meanwhile, Suseno stated that pluralism in the context of society is related to the willingness to develop values of respecting differences and tolerance between communities (Suseno in Culla: 1999, 190-191). Moreover, according to Roche, pluralism is always related to the democratic attitudes in honoring individual autonomy (Roche in Nash, 2002: 212). Thus, promoting pluralism in this paper is related to a mindset of honoring differences among people (in terms of cultural, race or religion) and including the willingness to make relation and develop tolerance between people.

In terms of honoring pluralism, Islam considers it as a main part of its message to humankind. This is because some of the verses in the Al-Qur’an and also the experiences of The Prophet clearly urge Muslims to honor this norm (Bakar in Nakamura, Siddique, Bajunid: 2001, 164-176). Furthermore, although some scholars, such as Cohen and Arato, tend to separate civil society and political society (Cohen and Arato: 1992), the group that seek and exercise power, including political parties, in general civil society is regarded as a domain between family and the state which has an intention to the political development and political activities in order to support a conducive condition for its advance, where political parties is part of it (Keane, 1998; Seligman, 1992). In this regard, this paper believes that political parties can be considered as an element inside the civil society.

### 3. Indonesia

As a country that consists of many ethnic groups, religions, ethnicities, customs and belief systems, plurality in Indonesia has become an unavoidable reality. In this circumstance, tolerance and acknowledgment of pluralism finds its relevance. Speaking about the development of pluralism in Indonesia usually relates to the commitment to the nation state. In the practical context, it is parallel with the attempts to defend Pancasila, UUD 1945 (the constitution) and establishing good relation with many other elements of the nation. From the 1980's until now, Islamic organizations in Indonesia have clearly demonstrated their commitment toward those attempts. In doing so, those organizations have implemented Islamic texts and the products of religious interpretation (*ijtihad*) as a basis of their thoughts and movements. Moreover, in order to reach their ideals, those organizations use both cultural (non-politics) and structural (politics) means. Meanwhile, their main focus in dealing with promoting values of pluralism related to some attempts such as preserving national harmony, improving tolerant attitudes and equality, developing inter-religious dialogue and refusing religious radicalism. In the next section, this paper will examine thoughts and movements of two influential Islamic organizations in Indonesia today, NU and PKS.

#### 3.1. Nahdlatul Ulama

Nahdatul Ulama (NU) is one of the two largest Islamic social organizations in Indonesia. This traditionalist Muslim organization was established in Surabaya on 31st January 1926 as a reaction to the emergence of Islamic reformist movements in Indonesia. Its social basis is the *pesantren* (the place of student who learns religion) and Muslims in rural areas (Anam, 1985). NU's stated purposes are mostly to maintain Islamic traditional teachings, such as the teachings of four *mazhabs* (schools of law), care of saints' cemeteries, practice of *Sufism* and *shalawatan* (odes to Muhammad) (Bruinessen, 1995). Some aims of this organization are the improvement of textbooks to determine whether they are appropriate to study, propagation of Islam based on the teachings of four Sunni schools of law, management of mosques, prayer houses and dormitories, looking after orphans and the poor. In 1984, NU declared to return to its original purpose as a social-religious organization, after joining political practice for decades. During its existence, NU has been known as an Islamic organization, which is

committed to nationalistic values and also enhanced tolerance of native cultures, *abangan* (nominal-Muslim) and non-Muslim groups.

#### ***a. NU's Perspective Toward Values of Pluralism***

NU's perspectives about pluralism have their basis in *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudences). This jurisprudence is a set of *ulama* (Islamic scholars) interpretations about Al-Qur'an and *hadiths*. Related to this, Fajrul Falakh explains that NU adheres to five basic principles of public interest as basic necessities of human beings, such as *hifz al-din* (the protection of religious consciousness and observances); *hifzh al-nafs* (the protection of life), *hifzh al-aql* (the protection of thought and freedom opinion), *hifz al-amwal* (the protection of property) and *hifz al-nasl* (the right to enter into marriage and the protection of reproductive rights). Such principles become a basis for NU's visions of brotherhood dealing with the existence of every Muslim in the world. This concept is called "three brotherhoods", which are *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (brotherhood among Muslims), *ukhuwah wathaniyah* (brotherhood among citizens) and *ukhuwah basyariyah* (brotherhood among human beings). With the emphasis on brotherhood among citizens and human beings, this basis became the main reason for NU to develop awareness of pluralism among its members (Falakh in Nakamura, Siddique, Bajunid, 2001: 35-37).

Based on its *fiqh* teachings, NU urges its members to spread out values of brotherhood and enhance toleration of all ethnic and religious minorities in Indonesia. One reflection of this teaching is NU's strong commitment to uphold and carry out Pancasila. In NU's opinion, Pancasila is a tolerant and acceptable ideology for every citizen, which is not only in line with the spirit of Islam but also a rational consequence of the commitment to establish a plural state like Indonesia (Sitompul, 1994: 90). In terms of state-society relations, by accepting Pancasila as a sole ideology, NU considers Pancasila as an open ideology where every citizen are guaranteed to have the same right to contribute ideas and preferences to enrich the understanding and implementation of Pancasila. In NU's opinion, this will make the essence of honoring plurality in Pancasila more apparent.

***b. NU's Commitment Toward Pluralism, Pancasila and National Values***

The manifestation of NU's in dealing with pluralism and national values could be seen from its activities in the 1940's, when NU officially agreed to accept Pancasila as the basis of the state. In the 1950's, despite NU being part of an Islamic faction that proposed Syari'ah to become foundation of the state, this interest eventually faded. In fact, later on, NU accepted Sukarno's concept of NASAKOM (*Nasionalis, Agama, Komunis*), which acknowledged the existence of nationalism, Islamism together with communism in Indonesia. During the 1960's until the 1980's, in the New Order period, NU played an insignificant role in promoting pluralism, mainly because of its focus in the political arena under the banner of *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (United Development Party).

NU's commitment toward pluralism and nationalistic values gained its momentum after 1980, particularly since the 27<sup>th</sup> *Muktamar* (Annual Meeting) of NU in Situbondo in 1984. On that occasion, NU's stipulated policies were: *first*, to return to *Khittah* (the original spirit of the organization); and *second*, to accept Pancasila as the basis for the organization and the sole principle for the state. By stipulating this policy, NU has officially retreated from the political arena (meaning officially out of PPP), and will only focus on social and religious affairs (Marijan, 1992). As a consequence, NU will have more time to empower and develop society by a cultural approach, including establishing cultural links with other civilian and non-Muslim organizations in order to enhance "civil society" and promoting pluralism in Indonesia. During the 1990's, NU has been popularly known as an organization that provided many forums for spiritual solidarity, including many seminars and conferences on values of pluralism and inter-religious communications. Because of such commitment, some international organizations have acknowledged NU as a committed religious organization to pluralism. In the Asia Pacific region, for example, this was reflected by an invitation to attend the Oslo Meeting. The main aim of this meeting was to promote inter-religious communication in order create harmony among people in the world (Falakh in Wahid, 1999: 62-63). Moreover, by accepting Pancasila as the sole basis, NU has showed its strong commitment toward national values (*nilai-nilai kebangsaan*) and also national plurality (*kemajemukan bangsa*) (Sitompul, 1994: 90).

Related to NU's commitment toward Pancasila, eight years later in 1992 NU held a *Rapat Akbar* (Great Meeting) in Parkir Timur Senayan, Jakarta. Around 150,000 members of NU from many provinces attended this meeting. The main purpose of this occasion was to restate NU's loyalty toward Pancasila, UUD 1945 (constitution) and democracy. According to Ramage, one of the main reasons for this rally was that NU wanted to prove that Islam was a supportive element for non-sectarian groups in Indonesia, and NU would stand behind Pancasila and reject the tendency toward religious fundamentalism (Ramage, 1995: 57-58). This is considered to be the biggest occasion that has ever been held by a non-governmental organization in Indonesia, NU actually also demonstrated to all Indonesian about its national commitment toward pluralism.

In the reform era, NU's commitment to Pancasila, pluralism values and democracy reflected in the establishment of National Awakening Party (PKB). Endorsed by its members, some NU leaders established PKB, which later become one of the prominent and largest parties in Indonesia. Even though it was established by *Ulama*, this party adopted Pancasila as its basis (*Asas*), showing the consistency of the NU's *Ulama* to adopt Pancasila as socio-political values. The use of the terminology "*Bangsa*" (Nation) not *Ummat* (Islamic Community) as the party's name also reflected NU's commitment in creating a party that could be accepted by all Indonesian regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds (Wahid in Muhammad, 1998: 6). As a reflection of such commitment, PKB has performed some actions that show its awareness of pluralism and national values (Setiawan and Nainggolan, 2004: 267) such as willingness to maintain good relations with non-Muslim political parties, namely the *Partai Demokrasi Kasih Bangsa/PDKB* (National Peace and Democratic Party) and rejecting the idea of laying back the seven words "*kewajiban menjalankan syariah Islam bagi para pemeluk-pemeluknya*" (the obligation for adherents of Islam to implement the Islamic law) into the Constitution (Basalim, 2002: 93-94).

### **3.2. Partai Keadilan Sejahtera**

*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS) or *Prosperous Justice Party* was established by Islamic intellectual activist community, who were also known as *aktivis dakwah* (Islamic missionary activists). This community appeared in the late 1970's, particularly after the New Order

stipulated the policy of Normalization of Campus Activities (*Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus*), which restricted student political activities and movements (Damanik, 2002: 42; Kamarudin, 2003: 73). In the 1980's this community, which was also known as *tarbiyah* (study group) movement, grew underground in Islamic institutions in some famous public universities (Siddiq, 2003; Amir, 2003: 83-90). In terms of ideology, this community was inspired by revivalist thinkers such as Hasan Al Banna, Sayid Qutbh (*Ikhwanul Muslimin*) or Maulana al-Maududi (*Jamaat-I-Islam*), which later made it appeared to be a prototype and symbol of the new stream in Indonesian Islamic political thought or the so called Islamic revivalism (Damanik, 2002: 98; Furkon, 2004: 131-132).

The collapse of the Soeharto regime in 1998 gave the people the opportunity to join freely in the political life. This momentum, eventually, encouraged this community to establish *Partai Keadilan* (PK) or the Justice Party, which was declared on 9 August 1998 in Jakarta. Even though this party has been inspired by revivalism, it has its own characteristics, which in general shows its moderated attitudes and thoughts (Noor, 2006). In 2003, PK changed its name to PKS (Prosperous Justice Party) due to the failure of gaining the requirement votes in the 1999 election. Based on the election regulation, PK must establish a new party in order to have the right to join the 2004 election. Today, PKS in essence is just a continuation of PK.

Table 1  
The Faction Composition in People's Consultative Assembly  
Period 1999-2004

Faction	Seats
Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle	185
Functional Group Party	182
Delegate Group	73
United Development Party	70
National Awakening	57
Reform	48
Crescent Star Party	14
Indonesia National United	13
Union of Muslim Community Sovereignty	10
National Peace Democratic Party	5
National Armed Forces/Police	38
Total	695

Sources: *Kompas*, Monday, 31 July 2000

### ***a. PKS' Perspective toward Values of pluralism***

The main reason for committing to pluralism in PKS point of view is Islamic teachings, which encourage every Muslim to value the differences between people. Moreover, Al-Qur'an also teaches every Muslims to respect the rights of non-Muslims, to spread out tolerance and to do justice for all the people (Burhanuddin, 2004: 69-78). Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad has taught during his life, about the willingness to sacrifice for the community, in a patriotic sense (Saksi, 2003). The party reflects its position in its official documents, that is in *Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga* (the Statutes Association and the Roles of Association) and *Prinsip Dasar* (the Basic Principles). The statutes and the rules of association of this party clearly acknowledge the existence of Indonesia as a plural nation, which consists of more than one religion (five official religions) and hundred of ethnic groups. While in the Basic Principles it is stated that:

*“National unity is a fundamental principal for developing a nation which is naturally heterogenous. Toward such a principal various communities inside the nation can be united, in the spirit of fraternity and togetherness.”*(PK Basic Principles, 1999)

Moreover, still in the same official materials, this party also asserts that its main interest is to propose the establishment of a state that can serve all Indonesian interests, regardless religious or ethnic background. In other words, the purpose of the state must be devoted to all of the Indonesian people, and not only the Muslim community. It is also said that the purpose of the party is to create a new Indonesia, which able to provide justice and prosperity, in God's favour, for all citizen (*The Statutes Association and the Roles of Association of Justice Party*, 1998). Furthermore, it is also said that the existence of the Justice Party is to bring to reality the *Semangat Proklamasi (Proclamation Spirit)* and preserve sovereignty and unity (*The Statutes Association and the Roles of Association of Justice Party*, 1998). In this way, it shows the spirit of nationalism, but also acknowledges the patriotic value such as Proclamation Spirit, which is a “trade mark” for a nationalist-secular party.

### ***b. Promoting Values of Pluralism***

Beside of its full support to the nation state in the normative field, this commitment is also reflected in PK's political activities,

particularly in the parliament. During early years of reform era, this party has displayed a non-exclusive attitude in the parliament. This was proved firstly when this party, together with the National Mandate Party (PAN), created Reform Faction (*Fraksi Reformasi*) in the Parliament. At that time, actually, some of the Islamic parties, that is – the *Ummat* Awakening Party (PKU), United Party (PP) and *Ummat Nahdatul* Party (PNU), which later established *Ummah* Sovereignty Fraction (FDU) – had offered Justice Party to create a sort of Muslim Faction (see table 1). However, as an Islamic party, the Justice Party eventually did not accept such proposal and preferred to create a faction with the PAN, which is a non-Islamic Party, has been known as the party that preferred *Pancasila* as their basic principle, and has a strong commitment to respect the values of pluralism (Maschab, 1998).

The Justice Party's commitment to pluralism can also be observed from their decision to propose the amendment of the 29<sup>th</sup> article of the Constitution, which was essentially different from the proposals that were offered by other Islamic Factions. The article itself, actually, is a crucial article for the whole nation, particularly, related to the existence of nation-state and the role of the state in religious affairs. Regarding to this condition, in general, the nation separated by two perspectives. One thought that the state should stay away from religious affairs as a private business; while others, on the other hand believed that the state has a moral obligation to deal with the religious activity to make sure that such matters would be carried out properly.

In the 2000 Annual Session, held by the People Consultative Assembly (MPR), there were four proposals made by factions for amending this article (see Table 2). Justice Party, under the Reform Faction's banner, proposed a "middle-way proposal" to amend the 29<sup>th</sup> article, which consisted of the spirit of respecting plurality among citizens. In their proposal, the Justice Party struggled for the rights of other religious adherents, by adding one verse to this article that stated: "*Every religion's adherents are obligated to serve their religious teaching*". With this statement, the Justice Party clearly rejected the attempt to restate *Piagam Jakarta* (the Jakarta Charter) into the constitution.

The first reason is that the Justice Party believes that Indonesia is not a single-religious country. Moreover, they believe that the obligation to perform religious activities must be carried out by all citizen (Muslims and non-Muslims) based on the spirit of equality

(Panjimas, 2003). However, with such a statement it does not mean that the Justice Party has neglected Islamic values totally. Instead, the Justice Party considered that what has already been done by them was close to the basic principle of the Medina Charter, which was conducted by Prophet Muhammad, during his government in the 7th century. In fact, some members of this party believe that if this proposal had been successfully accepted, the opportunity to implement Islamic Law would be more open (Damanik, 2002: 248-249).

Table 2  
The Proposals for Amending the 29 Articles  
In the MPR Annual Session Year 2000

	Proposal	Supported Faction
Proposal I	<p>Verse 1 The stated based on The One supreme God</p> <p>Verse 2 The state guarantees the freedom of the people to adhere a religion and perform the religious services based on their religion and believes.</p>	<p>Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle, Golkar Party, Delegate Group, Union of Muslim Community Sovereignty, National Peace Democratic Party, National Armed Forces/Police</p>
Proposal II	<p>Verse 1 The stated based on The One supreme God with the obligation for adherents of Islam to implement the Islamic law</p> <p>Verse 2 The state guarantees the freedom of the people for adhering and performing the religious services.</p>	<p>United Development Party, Crescent Star Party</p>
Proposal III	<p>Verse 1 The stated based on The One supreme God</p> <p>Verse 2 The state guarantees the freedom of the people for adhering and performing the religious services</p> <p>Verse 3 Every Religion adherents are obligated to serve their religious teaching</p>	<p>Reform, National Awakening Party</p>

Proposal IV	Verse 1	Indonesia National United
	The state based on Belief in the One and Only God, Just and Civilized Humanity, The Unity of Indonesia, Democracy Guided by the Inner Wisdom in the Unanimity Arising Out of Deliberations Amongst Representatives and Social Justice for the Whole of the People of Indonesia	
	Verse 2	
	The state guarantees the freedom of the people for adhering a religion and performing the religious services based on their religion and believes.	

Source: Umar Basalim. *Pro Kontra Piagam Jakarta di Era Reformasi*. Jakarta: Pustaka Indonesia Satu, 2002: 123-126.

The attitude to collaborate with various groups is also revealed after this party changed its name to PKS. In the Local Election for Government Head (*Pilkada*) process, PKS showed its commitment to cooperate with other political parties. In this process, PKS put forward its candidates individually in several areas. However, in general, PKS formed alliances with parties that have different ideologies. In some areas, PKS even built a coalition with Christian parties such as Prosperous Peace Party (PDS). This attitude, according to the Chairman of Party Advisory Assembly (MPP) of PKS Hilmi Aminuddin, is a concrete implementation of pluralism. Aminuddin stated that:

*“To nurture and maintain this nation’s pluralism, we develop pluralism through pilkada. There are 48 pilkada coalitions with various political parties. Out of 48 pilkada, we won 40 pilkada together with our coalition partners...Even in Eastern Indonesia, PKS formed a coalition with PDS, a party whose majority elements are Christian”.* (Suhartono, 2005)

This political attitude shows PKS’s commitment in honouring pluralism at the practical level and acknowledgement of the political right of other groups to participate in the political arena.

#### 4. Malaysia

The important meaning of pluralism in the Malaysian context, generally relates to the existence of many ethnic groups (Malay,

Chinese, and Indian) and communalism consciousness in the society. Such conditions have become a main issue and problem for Malaysia since its independence. Unfortunately, from the perspectives of Islamic groups, the Malaysian Government seems to have not taken this matter seriously and even uses ethnicity or communalism as a “political commodity” for its exclusive advantages. Such attempts eventually result in not only creating divided community, but also creating a kind of discrimination, particularly for non-Malay communities. If such conditions were not well managed, from the Islamic organizations’ point of view, this would become a dangerous threat for national unity. Therefore, the main concern of Islamic organizations is how to maintain and reduce communalism in the society by using Islamic values and provide an alternative Islamic system in governing the country based on the spirit of universalism and honoring pluralism. Moreover, Islamic groups believe, as a *rahmatan lil alamin* (mercy for the universe), Islam will lead the country to the national unity and ideal condition for society that is filled with the spirit of tolerance and justice values. In implementing their beliefs, Islamic communities, represented by some Islamic organizations, have exercised both cultural and structural approaches. In general, Islamic organizations use pluralism awareness as a critical points and alternative solutions for the Government’s attitudes and policies. In the next explanation, dealing with some matters above, this part of this paper will describe two prominent Islamic organizations in Malaysia, which are the ABIM and PAS.

#### **4.1. *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia***

*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM) was established on 6 August 1971 by some Islamic student leaders, mostly student leaders of the University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and institutions of higher education abroad. The main purpose of this organization is to spread Islamic teachings through Muslim students (Monutty, 1992: 78) and Malaysian society, which include creating an Islamic order for Malaysian society (Verma: 2002, 104).

In the first decade (1971-1980), this organization used a “confrontation approach” to the Malaysian Government. The second president of ABIM Anwar Ibrahim (1974-1982) made this organization well known by the people and also government by his “Islamist” movements. After the 1980’s, the main focus of this organization was to develop nation building together with other national elements in

Malaysia (www.abim.org.my). ABIM has proved itself as an Islamic charitable organization with high commitment to be independent from other institutions, particularly the government. In spreading of Islamic values, this organization has been also popularly known as an organization which uses cultural approach and peaceful *dakwah* (missionary work) in the spirit of Islamic methodology reform (Monutty, 1992: 79). In addition, although ABIM was influenced by Islamic revivalism in their thoughts, ABIM under the jargon “*We are tolerant and liberal*” (Anwar, 1999: 93) has developed tolerance attitude and rejected the kind of radicalism ways.

#### ***a. ABIM's Point of View toward Pluralism***

In terms of values of pluralism, ABIM regards these as one of the main values in this life that have to be noted by every Muslim. It is because plurality is a part of God's will (*sunnatullah*), and since every Muslim has to honor God's will, Muslims have an obligation to honor plurality. ABIM mentions that as a part of His will, God has created division among mankind into nations and ethnic groups, and called on its members to recognize one another (Risalah as quoted by Bakar, in Nakamura, Siddique and Bajunid, 2001: 65). It is clear that God, as stated by the Al Qur'an verse, obliges his followers to communicate and know other ethnic groups and make good relationship with them.

ABIM's main concern toward the values of pluralism in Malaysia lays in its ideal to release Malaysian society from the spirit of exaggerated communalism and enhance national integration based on spirit of understanding between ethnic groups. In ABIM's point of view, since the tendency of narrow-minded communalism has enhanced ethnic consciousness and sentiments among the people, Malaysia as a country is still essentially divided (Fadil in Monutty, 1992: 276). In fact, until now Malaysian national unity has been essentially still in the shadow of the danger of communalism. This condition eventually influences the process of national integration. In both cases, ABIM believes that inter-religious dialogue in order to promote ethnic equality is the best solution, not only to reduce the social-barriers between ethnic groups, but also to enhance national integrity based on mutual understanding. In ABIM's perspective, inter-religious dialogue is in line with the spirit of Islam. In fact, a good relation between people in the spirit of valuing pluralism has been demonstrated by the Prophet and through Islamic history, such attempts were not foreign in Islam.

***b. ABIM's Attempts in Promoting Pluralism: Islam and Multicultural Dialogue***

Concerning the problems of national unity and creating an ideal society in line with Islamic perspectives, ABIM promotes ethnic equality and inter-religious dialogue, based on Islamic values and the spirit of valuing pluralism. Such concern has been pointed out, firstly in 1976 when ABIM's President Anwar Ibrahim in international *dakwah* seminar urged the Malaysian Government to consider applying Islamic teaching entirely to take care many problems that faced by country, including - and mainly - the ethnic problems (Risalah, *ibid*, 2001: 65). This statement was a response to Malaysian Government's attitudes, which sometimes manipulated Islam for its exclusive interests, particularly to legitimate certain race and gain political interests. Based on this perspective, according to Monutty "ABIM has shown its displeasure with many UMNO leaders, who frequently claim that Malay equals Islam and Islam equals Malay" (Monutty, 1992: 169). It is because such a statement implies that Islam belongs only to the Malay and makes Islam has become the religion for the Malays only, and some of the people look at Islam and see racial prejudice. Thus, the Government's attitudes toward Islam and Muslim community, in ABIM opinion, are not only contradicting with the spirit of universalism in Islam, but also have endangered national harmony, because Islam has become a barrier between Muslim and non-Muslim, and eventually between Malay and non-Malay.

Meanwhile, in its annual conference in 1979, still in the same concern ABIM's leaders propose the theme "*Islam as a solution to the problems of Multi-Racial Society*". On that conference, ABIM proposed the adoption of an Islamic solution to the nation's communalism as a part of restating both of universal nature of Islam and the failure of the Government efforts in solving communalism issues (Bakar in Nakamura, Siddique and Bajunid, 2001: 65-66). ABIM stated that a new ethnic adjustment was a must and through implementing the Islamic teachings ABIM thereby minimizing racial differences in the country. In addition, as a manifestation of such concept, during the 1980s, several ABIM leaders later went-out into the society to convey ABIM's commitment and solution and all at once open inter-religious dialog with non-Muslim and non-Malay communities.

ABIM's president, for instance, attended The Malaysian Methodist Church (MMC) in Kuala Lumpur to participate in inter-

religious dialogue, “Religious Tolerance in Plural Society” (Bakar in Ali, 1984: 155). Meanwhile, some ABIM’s leaders also were present at 17<sup>th</sup> Hindu Youth Convention, which represented one of the most important occasions of Malaysian-Indian Youth, to address this organization on the same topic. Even due to his speech in ABIM’s annual meeting, Anwar was invited by non-Muslim and non-Malay political groups, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), to participate in its leadership seminar in the Cameron Highlands and sent representatives to several ABIM activities such as ABIM’s Annual General Meeting (Bakar in Ali, 1984: 155). ABIM also joined in important inter-religious conference, with the theme “Partners with People of Other Faiths” organized by the Young Malaysian Christian Association (YMCA). In that occasion, ABIM emphasized that all religions should come together in reducing dishonesty. Moreover, ABIM also stated that the principles of truth and justice for the sake of human welfare must be put as basic principles in establishing cooperation among religions. At that time, ABIM also regarded this conference as one of the important attempts to open new insights into understanding of pluralism. Osman Bakr, then secretary of ABIM, said that the importance of the conference was to cultivate a more genuine understanding among all religions in Malaysia. Furthermore, the responses given by non-Muslim organizations showed that ABIM movements have been considered seriously by those organizations (Bakar in Ali, 1984: 155).

Still in the spirit of open dialogues, ABIM has also established a good rapport with two influential social groups, ALIRAN (Social Reform Movement) and CAP (Consumer Association of Penang), which have members mostly from non-Malay and non-Muslim ethnic groups. The leadership of both associations has expressed their confidence in ABIM as an Islamic movement, which can represent not only Muslims but others as well. For the last few years, ABIM and CAP have jointly organized several seminars relating to the issues of development, urbanization, housing and the ethics of consumerism. In the current period ABIM also has an annual program, which is called “Islamic Outreach” as a part of *dakwah* program for non-Malay people. This program has demonstrated ABIM’s dedication not only toward the Malay community but also for the non-Muslim community. For ABIM this program is a kind of self-reflection in maintaining an open-minded and inclusive organization. It is stated that:

*“The establishment of dakwah for non-Muslim is one of the proves of ABIM’s equality movement. Dakwah program for non-Malay people as a continuation of Islamic outreach of ABIM is a program that definitely shows ABIM as a non-elitist group”.* (Tahir, 1993: 12)

#### **4.2. Parti Islam Se-Malaysia**

*Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) was formed in 1951 by some members of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) bureau of religious affairs under the leadership of Ahmad Fuad bin Hassan (www. parti-pas.org). This party registered as a political party in 1955, with the name *Persatuan Islam Se-Malaysia* in Penang and since then has become the main Islamic opposition party in Malaysia. In general the main reasons of this attitude that in PAS point of view, the government which led by UMNO, has paid less attention in creating state and society system based on the real Islamic teachings. Also, in PAS point of view, UMNO has failed in generating justice in the comprehensive meanings to all of citizen (Funston, 1980; Malhi in Hooker and Othman, 2003: 236-268; Mohammad, 1991). Led by pious Islamic leaders, particularly Islamic conservative scholars (*ulama/tok guru*), PAS has a commitment to implement Islamic teachings as a main principle of the party. As can be seen from its official document, the main objectives of the party is “*to struggle for the establishment of Islamic values and laws towards Allah’s will and to defend an Islamic purity in society and government, and to preserve independency, and sovereignty of the state*”. With such of those aims, this party demonstrated its commitment to form a kind of Islamic State (Verma, 2002: 107). Since 1982 this party has given priority to reformist Islamic goals. PAS’ strength mainly lies in rural area and Islamic traditional villages and it has become the major party in Kelantan and Trengganu.

##### ***a. PAS and Its Point of View toward Values of Pluralism***

Dealing with pluralism, as an Islamic party, PAS regards this ideal in line with the nature of Islam. PAS believes Islam promotes universal teachings that obligate its followers to treat humans equally. Islam comes to all human beings without any pretension to discriminate between individuals because of their cultural, racial or religious backgrounds. Thus, any discriminatory thoughts or attitudes, in PAS opinion, can be regarded as un-Islamic (*Anti-Tauhid*). Because of that teaching, PAS believes that the existence of the Islamic state will

guaranty the existence and even development of pluralism. In such a state the rights of the non-Muslim will be honored and protected following the example of the Prophet during his government in Madinah, and also other places such Egypt and Spain, during *Khalifah Islamiyah* (Islamic Empire) period where the existence of Coptic Christian and European was respectively protected (Bakar in Nakamura, Siddique and Bajunid, 2001: 67).

In the Malaysian context and in terms of state and civil relations, PAS' commitment to spread out values of pluralism derives from some reasons. *Firstly*, it is a response to government tendencies and policies that still use racial sentiments to reach some exclusive aims by maintaining ethnic consciousness. This condition will lead the country to a dangerous situation for national unity and also be unfavorable for Islam (Masrom, 1989: 35-36). *Secondly*, as pluralism is a part of Islamic teachings, PAS wants clearly to prove that the existence of Islam and its *ummah* (community) can be counted as the main part of supporting elements for pluralism. In this stance, PAS wants to prove that Islamic values are compatible with the values of pluralism. According to PAS' opinion, the struggle to create an Islamic state does not mean to ignore non-Muslim rights. As stated in PAS' official document:

*“To struggle the rights and interests of Islamic society, without neglecting the obligation to conduct justice for all Malaysian people and establishing the harmony among communities in this state”.* ([www.parti-pas.org](http://www.parti-pas.org)).

#### ***b. The Commitment in Promoting Values of Pluralism***

In reality, PAS' efforts toward promoting values of pluralism can be seen in some cases both at national and provincial levels. At least these kinds of efforts can be seen in two segments, *first* in terms of how PAS maintains its own government in states such as Kelantan; and *second* in terms of opposing Barisan Nasional (National Front) and creating “multicultural coalition” with non-Malay and non-Islamic groups. From these phenomena, PAS has actually been motivated not only by their religious interests, but also as a reflection of their political struggles to gain popular support from non-Malay citizens.

As a consequence of PAS' commitment in creating an Islamic state, its government in Kelantan State, where PAS has consistently been a winner since the 1980's, the state has adopted *Syari'ah* (Islamic

Law) for some regulations and policies. However, under such circumstances, in general it does not discriminate between non-Muslim and non-Malay. Even PAS government since the beginning has emphasized that an Islamic government will guarantee the non-Muslim to do anything based on their interests and religious values. As a manifestation from such perspectives, PAS government in Kelantan has demonstrated their commitment in some actions. In, the religious context, only one year after Nik Azis was elected to rule Kelantan, he stipulated a policy for reconstructing a giant 30-metre statue of Buddha (Hiebert, 1999).

Moreover, applications for non-Muslim places of worship have been sympathetically received. PAS Government has also approved the use of Malay reserve land for the expansion of Chinese temples and school. Furthermore, it is also planning to build-a multicultural mosque that would incorporate Chinese, Indian and other influences (The Economist, 2000). In the educational sector, PAS Government in Kelantan raises its financial assistance for Chinese schools by getting more state money. In Trengganu, when PAS run the state government, it offered to 10 Chinese schools more than M\$260,000 to be used as they see fit. In the business sector, licenses for various business activities are said to involve less corruption than before. Government had also appointed non-Muslim liaison officers to offer the minorities links with the government (Cordingley, 2001). Based on those activities, PAS actually intends to prove that as a basis of their action they believe that with Islam as a way of life and a universal religion under Islamic regulations, Muslims and non-Muslims would have the opportunity to live side by side in a spirit of tolerance and in an atmosphere of friendship. Since there is no compulsion in religion as the Qur'an says, non-Muslims would be free to practice their faith. Their places of worship would be protected. Similarly, they too would not be prohibited from holding public office or engaging in economic activities, or from owning property (Bakar in Nakamura, Siddique and Bajunid, 2001: 66).

In terms of political struggle, PAS' willingness to join with Front Nasional (National Front) reflected its good will in enhancing understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. In the current time, PAS is not only more assertive in championing the cause of Islam, but also gives concern to build a new relationship with non-Islamic segments of the Malaysian population. It particularly has started in a big way to draw links with non-Muslim Chinese and Indians by attending

their functions and explaining the Islamic political systems (Bakar, *ibid*, 2001: 68). As manifestation of this attempts, PAS has successfully build a close relation with DAP. For example, PAS now prints the English- and Malay-language editions of the DAP' *Rocket* newspaper. Meanwhile *Harakah*, newspaper published by PAS, appear on alternate weeks, ensuring there is always an opposition voice on the streets. PAS Secretary-General Nasharudin Mat Isa says that the current political situation in Malaysia has changed to issues such as justice, denial of people's rights and demanding those rights rather than issues on ethnicities. And because both PAS and DAP have the same main concern, it is normal if our supporters are reading each other's newspapers. Meanwhile in the parliament, younger PAS and DAP members of Parliament are getting closer. They find each other "easier to work with." And this happened mainly because both sides feel the same interests and "threats". One young PAS Member of Parliament remarks: "*We are young and we realize we are in the same trench fighting the same war*" (Cordingley: 2001). In addition, PAS nowadays initiating the formation of the Chinese Consultative Committee in order to promote better relationships among muslim and non-Muslim.

## 5. Conclusion

Influential Islamic organizations in both Malaysia and Indonesia believe that Islam is in line with pluralism ideas and considers it as the basis of their actions in dealing with promoting pluralism. Those organizations, however, represent different Islamic streams. NU is the champion of traditionalist Islam in Indonesia, while ABIM is close to the modernist Islam, on the other hand PKS and PAS is representing a new stream in contemporary Islamic thinking that is called as neo-revivalist or moderate fundamentalist. Even though each organization has their own perspectives and sometimes conducts a different path in political activities, for example in the case of supporting Megawati as a president in Indonesia that shows opposite stand between NU as a pro camp and PKS as an opposition, those organizations have similar concerns in pluralism and become an important element in developing civil society.

In relation to the pluralism, all of the organizations realize that diversity in their country is a main reason to spread tolerance and pluralism awareness to all the people. In Indonesia, the tendency of Islamic resurgence had been reckoned by NU as a potential threat of

national disharmony, and pushed this organization to mobilize Muslim to be more aware of it and suggest them Pancasila as a proper state principles for all Indonesian. On the other hand, PKS considers the diversity as a fact for Indonesia that should be regarded as a gift from the God and an opportunity for Muslims to prove the spirit of tolerance. As a consequence, NU and PKS have focused themselves on creating harmony and social equality. As a consequence, NU and PKS have focused themselves on upholding Pancasila and the constitution and trying to create harmony and social equality. While in Malaysia, the strong tendency of communalism and government's attitudes toward such matter are the main reasons of both ABIM and PAS in dealing with promoting pluralism. For this reason, both of the organizations have their main focuses in national unity, creating a new meaning of nationalism and making Islam as an alternative solution. Finally, in both countries, Islamic organizations use cultural and formal methods, which demonstrated many kinds of Islamic attempts in order to promote pluralism. Based on this evidence, Islamic organizations contributions' in promoting pluralism and civil society in Southeast Asia region cannot be denied.

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